



News Release

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CPS CONCLUDES INVESTIGATION INTO TUCSON ABDUCTION

PHOENIX - (January 12, 2005) The Department of Economic Security, Division of Children, Youth and Families has concluded its internal investigation and taken disciplinary action against two employees following the recent abduction of two children from a Child Protective Services (CPS) office in Tucson. The incident occurred during the children's December 30, 2004 visit with their parents. The investigation revealed that errors in judgment on the part of DES employees and contracted providers led to the children's abduction.

DES and CPS are committed to protecting children, strengthening families so that they can provide appropriate care for their children, and when that is not possible, finding children a safe, nurturing home. This commitment requires that we thoroughly scrutinize incidents where children in our care are harmed or placed in danger and that we take the appropriate and necessary action to prevent a recurrence.

The Department will provide as much information as possible to hold the agency and the entire system accountable for the incident, while at the same time, obeying all pertinent state laws regarding the confidentiality of CPS and state personnel records.

After reviewing the overall details of the CPS case and facts surrounding the incident in which the children were abducted, DES is taking disciplinary action against two employees for their involvement in the incident. Disciplinary action ranges from written reprimand to suspension or termination. State laws regarding the confidentiality of personnel information strictly prohibit the disclosure of any further specific personnel information.

In response to the situation, DES has concluded that:

- Although the parents and the contracted transportation provider checked in with the receptionist to gain access to the visitation room, that provider left the parents with the children without notifying a CPS staff member that they were there. The contractor will provide additional staff training regarding supervision and reporting. The Department is sending information to its contractors emphasizing the requirement that children be left with a CPS staff member responsible for their supervision. The first person to realize the children were missing was the same contracted provider. This provider, knowing the parents had no transportation, first attempted to locate the children alone, resulting in a delay in reporting to police of approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The report to police came from CPS staff immediately upon learning of the abduction.
- The visitation room the family was in had no access to the exterior of the building, but a neighboring room did. Since the incident, DES worked with its Facilities Management Office to ensure that this exit was not necessary to protect the safety of employees or clients using the building. Because it is not, the exit is now locked.
- In the days following the incident, top officials at CPS sent information to all staff highlighting the Department's current policies regarding visitation and reinforcing the need to ensure that the stated level of supervision is occurring.

- CPS administrators are reviewing existing CPS training, policies and procedures involving visitation to ensure that they protect children and to ensure that all stakeholders in the process have the information necessary to make decisions regarding visitation with children.

Abduction of the children occurred during a scheduled visit with their parents at a CPS office. The juvenile court had given CPS the discretion to vary the degree of supervision during the visits. This is a common social work practice that is crucial to allow families to work toward achieving their case plan goals and to help the children develop and/or maintain bonds with their families while issues of safety and permanency are being addressed.

When CPS is given this type of discretion by the court, supervision decisions are left to the discretion of the case manager with information gleaned from observing the family; documenting their progress in meeting case plan goals; speaking with treatment providers, foster families and others involved in the case; and, guidance from his/her supervisor. Safety of the children is paramount in this process.

DES is continuing to work with the South Tucson Police Department to provide whatever information is necessary to assist law enforcement in locating the children and ensure their safety.